



COMMISSION FOR WOMEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CLUSTER

February 14, 2022

Delegate Luke Clippinger
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Rules and Executive Nominations Committee
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 833 Criminal Law – Victims of Child Sex Trafficking – Safe Harbor and Service
Response
Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Chairperson, Clippinger, and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission for Women, I am writing to ask for your support of HB 833 — Victims of Child Sex Trafficking—Safe Harbor Service Response. This bill protects victims (primarily young women and girls) subjected to human trafficking and provides them with specialized services.

HB 833 provides a safe harbor for child victims of sex trafficking and prevents further victimization by connecting children to services needed through the already established regional navigator program. Victims do not report being trafficked when arrested because their trafficker threatened them - or - they don't understand that - what is happening to them is a crime. As a result, trafficked minors languish behind bars, with the isolation, stigma, and psychological trauma. Their trafficking experience is perpetuated by the systems supposed to protect them, and the criminal records resulting from being prosecuted become a barrier to the victim's future employment, housing, and future opportunities.

Children are, by law, considered victims of human trafficking per se if they are engaging in sex work; however, in Maryland, they can also be charged for the very act that makes them a victim. **If Maryland continues to prosecute children in the criminal or juvenile justice system and incarcerates them for actions directly related to their victimization, the state is contributing to the cycle of abuse.** Therefore, I urge a favorable report on HB 833.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Betty Romero
Co-Chair Strategic Planning, Research & Evaluation Committee
Member, Policy and Legislative Committee

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